VIReC RESEARCHERS' GUIDE TO VA DATA

Data Issues Brief   May 2004

1. New Listing of SAS® Files at Austin Automation Center

National Data Systems is cataloging the SAS files at Austin and soon will have a proc contents for each file available on the VA Intranet. The proc contents will be updated every two months in the event that the data structure has changed. The page will be updated shortly with a new layout and look & feel. The listing of files is at http://vaww.va.gov/nds/AACInfoSystems/SASFilesMain.asp.

2. Policy Issued on Defining and Recording Observation Patients

VHA Directive 2004-018, "Recording Observation Patients," was issued April 23, 2004. The directive provides the definition of an observation patient, the treating specialty and Cost Distribution Report codes to be used for care of observation patients, and the documentation requirements for records of observation patients. The directive is on the Internet at http://www.va.gov/publ/direc/health/direct/12004018.pdf.

3. VHA Data Quality Information Online

The Information Assurance division of the VHA Office of Information has published the April 2004 issue of the *Data Quality Highlights* newsletter. The cover story describes the VA Data Standardization Program, intended to ensure that VA data creation and storage meet standards of the information technology industry and various federal agencies. The newsletter is available on the VA Intranet at http://vaww.vhaco.va.gov/dataquality/newsletters.htm.

        The Data Quality Intranet Web site also has a new page entitled "Administrative Data Quality," which currently includes the new Administrative Data Quality Council (ADQC) charter issued March 31, 2004. The charter indicates that the ADQC focus is on information on eligibility and enrollment as well as demographic elements such as patient address, phone numbers, date of birth, gender, and dates of military service. The Data Consortium, of which VIReC is a member, is an ad hoc member of the Administrative Data Quality Council. See the VA Intranet site at http://vaww.vhaco.va.gov/dataquality/adq.htm.

4. "Registry Research and Medical Privacy"

With April 14, 2004, being the one-year anniversary of compliance with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), it is timely that the April 1, 2004, issue of the *New England Journal of Medicine* included both an article, "Registry Research and Medical Privacy," and an editorial pertinent to the topic. The VA Library Network, http://vaww.vhaco.va.gov/VALNET/NEJM.asp, has the journal online.

5. Focus on Outcomes Research

The *Medical Care* Supplement of April 2004 (Vol. 42, No. 4) is entitled "Outcomes Research: New Priorities for an Evolving Field." The supplement includes papers presented at an AHRQ-sponsored workshop held June 10-11, 2002. A table of contents for the supplement is available at http://lww-medicalcare.com.

6. Spring Issue of HDR / CPRS-R Newsletter

Issue 5 of the newsletter "HDR / CPRS-R" includes an article reporting on the new direction for development of the Health Data Repository (HDR). The newsletter is available on the VA Intranet at http://vista.med.va.gov/HDR/Newsletter.html.

7. Federal Agencies Focus on Health Information Technology

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Secretary, Tommy G. Thompson, has appointed David J. Brailer, M.D., Ph.D., as national Health Information Technology Coordinator. Creation of this new position is consistent with other federal developments, such as adoption by federal agencies of 15 standards proposed by the Consolidated Health Informatics (CHI) initiative to allow for electronic exchange of clinical health information across the federal government. These and other advances in health informatics standards are described in a May 6, 2004, press release by HHS; see http://www.hhs.gov/news/press/2004pres/20040506.html. Related information about the VHA's Health Information Technology Sharing (HITS) program is on the VHA Intranet at http://vaww1.va.gov/vhaitsharing/.